1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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too deep for the pole-stick. When we go in the center, it is slow. . . . *Koti go!*—Cut across!" he shouted in his shrill voice, as our boat and the others after us veered over to the other side of the stream where the current was less strong.

"How do you know just where these places are?" we asked. "There are so many channels, so many islands. How can you tell?"

"*Ma, kye!* What would you? I belong to this bush. An old man knows his river."

Steadily the boats went ahead in this long, quiet stretch. For fully half an hour the men worked in silence, doggedly going upstream close to the bank, until under the shade of a tree they saw a boat resting.

"Tio, odi! Tio, odi!" Each of our men addressed the two in the boat.

"Tangi, tio! Tio, odi," they answered each one, until finally they said, "Odi, Bak'a," greeting the stranger last, as was the custom.

Our men explained, "We are going to the Saramacca country, up the river to the Granman. We are carrying the Bakra to the Granman. They belong to America country. They traveled in a fire ship for twenty-one nights and days to come to the Saramacca. Twenty-one nights and days, mati, without resting. *G'an sundyi*—A great state of affairs."

The man said, "We come from the Marowyne. The river is high. The next rapids are difficult. Let us travel together."

And so we were five canoes. Ahead, we could already hear the dull murmur which would soon crescendo to the final roar. This was the water pouring over the first rocks in the distance.

"What rapids are these?"

"We must not talk about this here. Wait until we pass them. If we speak the name, the spirit will come, and he will be angry. The boat might go over. We might lose part of our load."

Now we came closer to the line of white, which rose higher and higher. Except for the bits of white foam like

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the Bak'a himself tell why he has come the long way to the Saramacca river and what it is he seeks."

There was a general chorus of agreement, and silence awaited our accounting.

As the town man began to repeat our words to the Granman, the quiet of the house was heightened by an occasional stirring outside the paling. From where we sat, we could see brown motionless feet, which told us that there were many more than those inside, who were listening to the white man's reason for being in the bush.

Again the Granman made the traditional responses.

"So it is, white man."

"True, what you have said, bassia."

Finally our telling was at an end. Again there was a silence as we sat, tensely waiting.

The Granman again broke the silence.

"Friends, chiefs, you have heard. The white man is here. He comes to learn of our life. The gods of the river have brought him and his woman safely. The Great God sent the rain to cool the air when he reached Asindopo Lantiwe. The gods are more than I am. The river is more than I am. But the Saramacca people are also more than I am. It is you, headmen of the Saramacca people, who must speak."

"Ai, G'aman," said the man who had the stripes of white on him and who wore the many obias. "But have the ancestors spoken?"

"Truly you ask, friend," was the response. "It is well that you think of these things. In the bush, we think before we speak. Do you go aside and consider well."

Slowly the members of the krutu arose from their benches. Softly, with bent form, each passed out of the doorway. We were alone with the Granman, who waited with us for the reply of the chiefs.

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As the elders slowly filed out of the council house, it was as though a jury were leaving the courtroom to decide a case which had been laid before it. And as we learned more,

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776 787 825 This shows that in the minds of the Refugee Blacks, the animal is simply a prop for the god. The god borrows this body in order to manifest itself, but it is not bound to it by nature. These conceptions are totally contrary to those of the Indians, who tend to personify in their minds the beings and phenomena of nature.

776 787 As we have said, the Boni do not see these gods since the person possessed loses consciousness. But in the time of the ancestors, there were people who used to see the gods, and it is through them that their present-day descendants have an idea of their appearance; on the other hand, certain gods such as the Ampuku and the Bũnsuŋki may be seen in dreams.

Sometimes the residence of this or that god is known, for it has revealed it through the mouth of its bearer; the god's [823] name is then given to that place. For example, at the mouth of the Abounami there is a fall named Ma Akoti Gadu Sula. It is there that the god resides which revealed itself in olden days in an old woman named Akoti.

776 613 Connections with the group of relatives. The idea of a god protector of the lineage, whose worship, brought by the founder of the group, is regarded as indispensable to the life of the collectivity, is not found clearly among the Refugee Blacks. There are actually many divinities which have entered the lineage and which are worshiped collectively. But these di- [784] vinities are intruders; they have penetrated into the group by force in order to exert an inexorable vengeance against it. [782] People do not apply to them to ask for protection, and they are worshiped only because they cannot be expelled.

776 602 /205/ There is not believed to be any kinship tie between the gods and men, nor any tie of a systematic or exclusive character.

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787 784 If someone has a Kumẽnti, certain objects used in the cult: pestle, mortar, machete, must not be raised near him. His gita "would rise" immediately. Likewise while he is eating, neither tiger nor gun must be mentioned. To prevent their gita from rising, those concerned may take the precaution of putting a small piece of wood behind the ear while they eat.

787 178 [771] [781] [484] [743] [755] These past years the cult of the Kumẽnti was clearly declining among the Boni, as was the whole of their religious life; every one, indeed, no longer thought about anything but earning money and was always traveling in order to do this, which made difficult the indispensable meetings and dances. On the other hand, cared for effectively when they are ill in the Maripasoula hospital, the Boni feel the cult of the Kumẽnti less necessary, of which the principal social function is to cure. So, while in 1948 we used to be present very often at manifestations of the gita of Kumẽnti, in 1952 they were becoming much rarer and more secret /modest/. They were tending to fall to the level of the latent manifestations of which we shall speak further on. In 1956 we did not observe in the course of the forest [346] work any spontaneous attack of this gita. The chapels dedicated to the Kumẽnti are scarcely maintained and are falling into ruins; such is the fate of the gods judged benevolent toward men. [751] Nevertheless people continue to lay great store by the ɔbia of Kumẽnti, especially the man nẽŋge ɔbia which protects against the machete and the gun, and the Kumẽnti bui, ring of Kumẽnti, instrument of divination.

776 [823] [787] The Bũnsuŋki. The Bũnsuŋki are gods which live in the waters, by preference at the head of falls, beside rocks bearing copses of detached trees; they can also reside ordinarily in these trees themselves. They appear sometimes in dreams to men as well as to women in the aspect of Indians, more commonly Indian women with long hair. This is why they are sometimes called wata Iŋgi, Indians of the water.

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755 823 [174] White clay, pɛmba (the word and the rite are of Congolese origin), does not undergo any special preparation. In the thought of the Refugee Blacks it has the power to fix upon a man's body the magic influence of the infusion of leaves.

791 Among the Boni, except for the cult of Odun, there are no priests, strictly speaking, invested with a function at the same time social and religious. A large number of persons

756 791 are regarded as "knowing remedies." This notion implies at once knowledge and power. In general the ɔbiamã is believed to hold only a specialized power; for example, he knows how to prepare a hunting ɔbia, or an ɔbia for protection against wisimã. This power he received from his father (as an exception, it seems, from his uncle), who instructed him, before dying, in the specialized rites it requires and transmitted his power to him by giving him mula.

To give mula to someone, one blows into his hands, one puts them on his head while uttering a formula by which one transmits to him a certain power or piece of magic knowledge.

What is the criterion of legitimacy? Who has the right to call himself an ɔbiamã? It seems that basically everything is reduced to this: the ɔbiamã has the conviction, the sensation that he holds this power; as for his clients, they believe they observe the efficacy of his ɔbia; if they stop having confidence in his remedy, they will abstain from coming to ask it of him, that is all; no social prohibition comes to limit the action of

[754] the ɔbiamã. The grand man intervenes only against someone who might claim to hold remedies to harm another person or to capture his will, which would be wisi. /2 /

[888] /249/ The Boni accept the possibility of deception as regards ɔbia, especially by people who are too young, but they have the conviction that the elders (people over 55-60) possess wisdom and that one can apply to them with complete confidence.

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461 829 431 On the material plane the same conception explains the high importance attached to fair payment for work done, the holy fury which takes possession of Refugee Blacks who consider themselves wronged; it also explains why they can interpret a free gift only as a mark of weakness except in exceptional cases (present given by a high official on the occasion 431 829 of a visit). A gift which does not have the character of an exchange has no spiritual value for them; it brings only scorn and near hostility, for they feel that the object has not been legitimately acquired and that they are not in tune with their moral law.

Local Divinities

776 823 The Refugee Blacks assume the existence of local divinities exercising a de facto power on such-and-such a portion of the country. Since their very special mode of life leads them to circulate almost exclusively along rivers, with them this idea has been transposed into a double notion: the divinities of the rivers and the gods of the soil. In their minds those are two entirely separate conceptions: the power of the god of the soil stops at the edge of the water and conversely.

De facto worship is rendered the divinities of the river according to the rites set by the first users of the river. In practice, worship is rendered only to the divinities of dangerous rivers where accidents are frequent. People do not bother with the others.

These gods are designated indiscriminately by the words gadu and sani (thing, being), indicating that their nature is not known.

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776 One of the best known of these gods is that of the Maruini.
823 It is assumed to control all the tributaries of the Maruini as far
778 as their sources. Its place of worship is a thicket situated downstream from the dangerous Kubi Sula Falls, at the mouth
782 of the river. Before starting to go upriver in August, 1956,
[539] the crews of our three boats, in an atmosphere of great meditation, lined up behind the eldest of them, who made the offering of water and tafia, uttering these words: "God who commands this river, watch over us, keep us from being sick, let no accident happen to us; if there is on this river an interdiction which we do not know (2) and which, through

2. It is obvious here that this is a case of de facto worship of a divinity about which nothing is known.

ignorance, we do not observe, pardon us. Bring us back to our villages safe and sound." The boatmen came one after the other to make the offering of tafia. The scene lasted more than a quarter of an hour. This ceremony was not without nobility, engendering belief in that sincere fervor of animists so often mentioned in the /259/ ethnographic literature.
771 But our return at the end of our work trip took place in a completely different atmosphere, showing the strictly practical and utilitarian side of the religion of the Refugee Blacks. Once past the Kubi Sula, the three boss boatmen could not persuade any of their men, who were in the act of eating their meal, to accompany them as far as the place of worship to thank the god. Some told us straight out that they were scoffing at this god from now on, having no intention of
[782] coming back on the Maruini. As for the boss boatmen themselves, they measured stingily the quantity of tafia offered